

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CAIRO 15044 141624Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 15044

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG PINT ELAB
SUBJECT: LABOR UNION OFFICIAL ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

1. MAHMOUD DABOUR, PRESIDENT OF BANK AND INSURANCE WORKERS UNION, TOLD EMBOFF JUNE 13 THAT RECENT SADAT POLITICAL MOVES HAVE NOT MET WITH POPULAR APPROVAL, EITHER AMONG UNIONISTS OR EDUCATED ELITE. ONLY PEASANTS, HE MAINTAINED, FULLY SUPPORTIVE. OTHERS FEAR IT REPRESENTS FIRST STEP IN RETURN TO REPRESSIVE REGIME, UNDER WHICH LABOR SUFFERED MORE THAN MOST. DABOUR SUGGESTED SADAT RECOGNIZES UNPOPULARITY OF DECISION AND FELT THIS DEMONSTRATED BY PRESIDENT'S "NERVOUSNESS" IN RECENT SPEECHES.

2. NEVERTHELESS, DABOUR CONCLUDED SADAT WAS RIGHT TO TAKE FIRM ACTION: INTERNAL SITUATION HAS BECOME SERIOUS. EGYPTIAN PUBLIC EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED BY LACK OF PROGRESS IN PEACE PROCESS. EGYPTIANS CAN BE SATISFIED SO LONG AS "DAILY BREAD" PROVIDED, OR "PROMISED" THAT IT WILL COME IS ON HORIZON. HOPES FOR PEACE, REPRESENTED SUCH A "PROMISE" AND HAD MAJOR ROLE IN DAMPING DOWN DOMESTIC DISSENT. WITH HOPE EXTINGUISHED,
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CAIRO 15044 141624Z

ATTENTION CONCENTRATED ON INTERNAL PROBLEMS, WHICH DABOUR DESCRIBED AS INTRACTABLE AND PERVASIVE.

3. DABOUR NOTED THAT NEITHER WAFD NOR LEFT, IN NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WOULD REPRESENT ANY THREAT TO STABILITY. HOWEVER, DESPAIR OVER PEACE PROSPECTS HAS CONVERTED PUBLIC INTO "SEA OF GASOLINE". DABOUR DESCRIBED

WAFD AND LEFT AS "MATCH" WHICH SADAT FULLY JUSTIFIED ATTEMPT PREVENT BEING THROWN.(HE ALSO SUGGESTED EVENTS IN AFGHANISTAN HAD INFLUENCED SADAT'S DECISION.)

4. DABOUR HYPOTHESIZED EXTENT OF CRACKDOWN WILL BE DEFINED BY OPPOSITION'S REACTION. IF THEY ACCEPT THEIR DISENFRANCHISEMENT PEACEFULLY, SADAT LIKELY APPLY NEW POWERS LENIENTLY. SADAT, SAID DABOUR, CAN BE UNDERSTOOD BEST IN "PEASANT" TERMS: PRESIDENT IS STUBBORN AND RE-ACTS STRONGLY WHEN CHALLENGED. IF OPPONENTS ATTEMPT STAND UP, THEY WILL BEAR BRUNT OF SADAT'S RAGE.

5. THUS FAR, UNIONISTS HAVE LARGELY ESCAPED SOCIALIST PROSECUTOR'S SCRUTINY. FEW, ACCORDING DABOUR, FALL UNDER PROVISIONS NEW LAW. HE LISTED THREE INDIVIDUALS, TWO OF WHOM WERE EXPELLED FROM UNION POSITIONS PRIOR TO REFERENDUM AS POTENTIALLY LIABLE, THIRD IS MEMBER OF DABOUR'S UNION. TO DATE, BANK WORKERS COUNCIL HAS REFUSED TO TAKE ACTION AGAINST HIM AND HAS RECEIVED NO FORMAL REQUEST DO SO. HE REFUSED TO SPECULATE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF SOCIALIST PROSECUTOR DEMANDS ACTION. EILTS

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